

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (canceled)
2. (canceled)
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8. (canceled)
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12. (canceled)

13. (currently amended): An apparatus for continuous production of diaryl carbonates by reaction of a dialkyl carbonate and an aromatic alcohol in the presence of a transesterification catalyst, said apparatus comprising: first, second and third reactive distillation columns, and a first rectification column and second rectification column and a plurality of lines for transporting reactant and product streams, wherein:

(a) the first reactive distillation column is connected to input lines for the introduction of reactants, and to first and second transfer lines, said first transfer line running from the top of the first reactive distillation column to the middle of the first rectification column and the second transfer line running from the bottom of the first reactive distillation column to the second reactive distillation column;

(b) the second reactive distillation column is connected to third and fourth transfer lines, said third transfer line running from the top of the second reactive distillation column to the top of the second rectification column, and said fourth transfer line running from the bottom of the second reactive distillation column to the third reactive distillation column;

(c) the third reactive distillation column is connected to a first output line for providing diaryl carbonate product from the bottom of the third reactive distillation column and a first recycle line running from the top of the third reactive distillation column to the middle of the first reactive distillation column;

(d) the first rectification column is connected to a second product line for providing dialkyl carbonate/alkyl alcohol azeotrope from the top of the first rectification column, and a second recycle line running from the bottom of the first rectification column to the bottom of the first reactive distillation column; and

(e) the second rectification column is connected to a third product line for recovering alkyl aryl ethers from the bottom of the second rectification column and a

third recycle line running from the top of the second rectification column to the bottom of the first rectification column, wherein a fifth and sixth transfer lines run in opposing directions between the bottom of the first rectification column and the top of the second reactive distillation column.

14. (canceled)

15. (original): The apparatus of claim 13, wherein an augmentation line is connected to the fourth transfer line for introduction of an augmenting reactant stream into the third reactive distillation column.

16. (original): The apparatus according to claim 13, wherein the first, second and third reactive distillation columns each comprise a reactive portion and a rectification portion, and wherein the reactive portion of each column contains packing or fixed internals effective to provide 10 to 60 theoretical distillation steps.